



# THE ART OF TIV RELIGIOUS POETRY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO LEADERSHIP IMPROVEMENT IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Attempts at achieving qualitative and effective leadership have appeared to be elusive in our society today. Leadership trainings, workshops and conferences meant to entrench good leadership qualities in leaders at various strata of governance have seemingly not availed much. Governments keep being voted out on account of poor leadership qualities it exhibited while in power. No one really seems to have a formula for good leadership which is an essential ingredient for good governance and invariably, national development in all spheres of our society. This paper is preoccupied with providing alternative ways of sourcing for and achieving good leadership through the art of religious indigenous sung-poetry. This form of poetry is informative and provides instruction on how leaders can draw inspiration from biblical leaders whose leadership qualities are uncontested and if emulated, could greatly influence the leadership style of leaders in Nigeria, as well as fast tract national development. This could be made possible through the composition and listening to indigenous religious songs that are instructive on good leadership from the biblical perspective.

## Introduction

Music plays an important role in the lives of people and in most ethnic groups in Nigeria, the art of songs and music are an integral part of daily lives, from birth to death. For this reason, religion in Africa usually embraces life as a whole and worship touches on all aspects of life. Songs are therefore composed to suit different occasions which include fishing, hunting, farming, grinding, marriages, funerals, war and wrestling (Akpanika, 2012). These songs are used to facilitate retention and dissemination of core moral values and laws within the society. It can also unlock valuable anthropological data which is often inaccessible in any other way (Chenometh & Bee, 1968 & Akpanika, 2012).

The advent of the missionaries in Nigeria who planted the Nongu u Kristu u i ser sha Tar (Universal Reformed Christian Church) in Tivland, ushered in their perception of indigenous music as heathen, archaic, outdated and as the devil's instrument for the destruction of Christian lives. They therefore ignored this aspect of African culture in their bid to evangelize. A good Christian to them was one who would not sing folk songs, dance, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes etc. They rather introduced western hymns, prayers and preaching which were all alien to the African culture and difficult to understand. According to Kidula (2008), "western music is modern, melodic, complex, aesthetic, mental, intellectual, creative and a product of culture while the African music is primitive, rhythmic, simple, functional, physical, emotional, expressive and a product of nature".

This paper reviews the essence of indigenous religious Tiv sung-poetry which touches of different topical issues, including leadership. Tiv is an ethnic group or race found in Benue State, Central Nigeria and also to the language spoken by these people. According to Udu (2009), Tiv is a splinter group of the Bantu and belongs to the Niger-Congo language family, further classified as Benue-Congo language. They inhabit quite a substantial portion of the Benue valley and the region extends on both sides of the River Benue, covering an area about 30,000 square kilometres and is located between latitudes 70 30' to 80 10' north and longitude 80 10' east (Tsevende, Agber, Iorngulum & Ugbagir, 2013).

Christianity came to Tivland through the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) from South Africa in April, 1911. The religious songs they introduced to the converts were translated from Afrikaans, these were translated into Tiv language and are known as "Atsam aa i gem aa gema" meaning, "Translated hymns." Evidence of the source of these songs include the South African National Anthem which is hymn No. 183 in the Tiv hymn book of translated hymns. Some of the tunes of the hymns given at the bottom of each hymn still remain in Afrikaans.

Akpanika (2012) asserts that these songs that were brought by the western missionaries and imposed on the indigenous churches lacked the expression of joy, love and exuberance that is characteristic of the indigenous values of worship. The introduction of western hymnbooks with sol-fa and organ and the rejection of indigenous music and instruments introduced a form of liturgy that was

clothed in foreign attire and was dull for people who were used to vibrant and exultant music. Moreover, the songs were difficult for the indigenous worshippers who could not read and write.

The use of Afrikaans hymnbook by the DRCM missionaries did not fulfil the musical aspiration of the Tiv converts even after the translations. This did slow down the work of evangelism among the Tiv people. The missionaries came in 1911 and it was not until 1917, six years after their arrival and gospel propagation that 4 converts were baptized (Shii, 2011). It is believed that the use of alien hymns translated to the language for worship were detrimental to the cause of evangelism. The translation still did not make these hymns a cultural fit because the tones and lyrics were forced or imposed on the hymns and in most cases did not convey the worldview and experiences of the Tiv people the way Tiv songs and music did.

According to Kraft (1996), "when you take a melody from the West and put words to it from a tone language, you frequently end up with rather serious distortions." At the inception of the Christian culture in Tivland, the people found it hard to embrace the religion of the foreign God and this was partly attributed to the nature of their worship songs. The missionaries failed to see where the Tiv people were coming from, they were a people with a rich repertoire of arts, including music and dance. Hagher (1981) contends that;

Apart from ritual chants, the bulk of Tiv religious poetry is derived from the worship of the Christian religion. The first encounter of the Tiv with a missionary party was in 1875 at Abinsi but it was not until 1911 that South African missionaries settled in Tivland. It is difficult to count the achievements of the Dutch Reformed who were determined to destroy Tiv customs by coming down heavily on Tiv performing arts, debarring Christians from taking part in music making or dancing. Instead of Tiv songs, they embarked on copious translations of Afrikaaner songs into Tiv. Result was a forced marriage of foreign rhythms with Tiv words in the songs of worship.

The missionaries' encouragement of the Tiv converts to compose worship songs in their language, drawing from their cultural repertoire of tunes and melody was a much later development. Shii (2011) affirms that an evangelist trainee known as Akaer Gar composed the first indigenous Christian hymn in praise of God, which did not have a semblance of a hymn but it at least it condemned evil ways. By 1926, other converts like Jeremiah Kanyam Lyemen began to compose songs which were in tune with the secular Tiv oral poetry and many people began to embrace the new religion. Since then many composers of indigenous religious worship songs have evolved. This began at a time when the protestant church fell into the hands of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) made up of missionaries from America who appeared to be more liberal and encouraged the ordination of indigenous pastors than the DRCM missionaries who came from apartheid South Africa in 1911. The SUM also observed that performance was central to Tiv life and dance and song were central to their free spirit. This gave birth to indigenous religious poetry in Tivland. Among the Tiv composers that evolved at this time

were Ityavger Fate, Samuel Kakwagh, Timothy Adoo, Gideon Yaku and Nathan Kpurpur Jev. Ephraim Eryum Zuzu whose song "Oryina u hemen ior" (Man is unworthy to lead) is one of the contemporary Tiv religious composers who have created a lot of impact in the believers' world. Many people claim listening to these evangelical Tiv sung Christian poetry that comprise catechizing narratives of bible passages had informed their conversion to Christianity.

The themes of these hymns embrace topical issues in our society like leadership, child rearing, peaceful coexistence, songs of comfort for the bereaved, marriage songs and many other issues are addressed in the songs. They are sung to musical accompaniments of drums, gongs, rattles and flutes. The structure of the songs is also traditional, with the lead singer singing the solo beginning known as "Mnder" while the congregation sings the refrain "Mrumun." The lead chorus lines are followed by the stanzas (Hagher, 1981). The songs draw insights from the Bible with biblical messages to listening believers and unbelievers alike, using Bible passages which are applied to everyday happenings in society. The songs sometimes follow the folktales narratives as the narrator brings out the theme of the song as chorus emphasize the theme in the refrain.

#### An Analysis of the song Oryina u Hemen Ior By Ephraim Eryum Zuzu Tiv

Mnder: Or yina u hemen ior, ka We tseegh Ter Aondo U kom sha u hemen ye.

Mrumun: Or yina u hemen ior, ka We tseegh Ter U Ter wase u kuma sha u hemen ye, ishima wan kpa ka we Ter, mbapuun we, kpa we orhemem U ngu kuran se cica.

1. Ter Aondo se tseegh yo ka u se yar ikyor i orhemem hanma shie, ka we iyol yough u kom u hemen kpilaor ye. Sha igbetar la je we Ter u ngu orhemem u tar abumeior nga kpishi kua mbanyion asema, mba gbannum kpa U hemem, shi mbaeren sha shima yough ve lu ye, Kaape kpilaor asema kposo kposo uhemen, se u uma ka kpe se iyol u hemen ga (2x).
2. Hii sha mba hemem sha ihinda i ungoov, man mba hemem sha uya uya shin utor mba i we ve piaven sha ikyev, or u nan lu di or u hemem kpilaor tso yo nan apuu ga, u u hemem ior itian yo guda ina u abua dubu pue kpa u kuran a iember (2x).
3. Uniungwan mbaasemav mban ve vihi hemem, kwagh u doon sha ci ve kpa, kpilaor i rumun zwa mom elegha yo ne yo ka ican. Nenge er ku u vihi hanma or, kpa u pine wer i bunde ku ken tar ne mbagen vea venda, er orihom ve a va tsor, Ter Aondo ti yo lan asema ase ga pin se ma kwagh ga (2x).
4. Er a er sha won ve ikpilaor i a de u yoosu a we yo ka han je se ungwa er, faro hemem Israel ken Igititi, na ve ican sha won mliam ger Ter wase ka senen na, tsuan na Mose er a hemem ve gbenda ve za mem ican ken tar u kaanan la (2x). (Exodus 12:31-34)
5. Ter ngohol ve sha ikyev i Faroo na Mose hemem ikpilaor u yemen tar u Kanan, uwegh ku Uhembam lu sha ve pe yang eve hungwa ifi akev akev ne. Lu kuran ve sha ikyev i mbaihyomov, ve a vaa akor ter Ana swase. Ve lu anyor ga je tso hemem u sha ayange a Mose due shima, ior lam lu puun tomun hemem u sha ikyev i Tor Faroo ken tar u Igititi la (2x). (Ekesodu 12: 31-34, 16:13)
6. Mba ve lu mba hemem yo ve umbur er ikpilaor kegh ashe ave kua ijo, Aondo tema sha kwavijir unghan, shi nengen hemem u ior. Kpilaor a gba ahon a we hen tar ne, alu ibo yough yo Ter A na ve isho, a lu isho yough yo Ter A de ve ga. Tsaha mba ve hemem sha ifer, shi ve mba gban ahon sha ifer la, yange tim Abiram vea Koraki man Datana uma (2x). (Numeri 16:1-27).
7. Kwagh ne ka kwagh u cieryol se er nen surua ga yange se kpela iyugh, sha ma or ti ugen uu Ter Aondo A ver yo, ngise Ter kaa aa Aberam er Mngu veren we, or a wa u ifan i a kor nan, or u nan ver u doo doo nan alu aa iveren. Amba la ahegen ne kpa shi nga ken tar ne her, u ker isha ve Aondo iyol na Ter A goho u ishe (1x). (Genese 12:3)
8. Kwagh ne ka kwagh u cier iyol se er nen surua, ga iyange se kpela iyugh sha ma orti ugen uu ter Aondo A ver yo, ngise Isaka kaa a Yakob er mngu veren we, or a wa u ifan i akor nan, or u nan ver u doo doo nan a lu aa iveren, a mba la ahegen ne kpa shi nga ken tar ne her, u ker is ha ve Aondo iyol na Ter A goho u ishe (1x). (Genese 27:29)
9. Ngohol kwagh wan we or u hemem de te ave vanger ga, kaape Mose yange ngohol kwaghwan hen Yetero yange sor hemem na. Son Ter A na kwaghfan, pe Solomon lu tese se ne (2x). (Ekesodu 3:1-18)
10. Se wasen mbahemem sha mba myina vev se de gban ahon aa ve sha mpuu, i lu ior mbagenev yo yange hemem u Mose hee, shighe u ave kpe Mose ken utya la. Kpa yange Aaron kua shi Hur yange ve wase korun un ave, lu sha doong tso ve hembra tyav ve kur a iember (2x). (Ekesodu 17:12) Zuzu (1999).

#### English Translation

Solo: Man is unworthy to lead people, it is only you Lord, who is worthy to lead.

Refrain: Man is unworthy to lead people, it is only you, father of our Lord who is

worthy to lead, you are patient in the face of those who condemn, and You take every one along.

1. If not for You Lord, we would always glean for leadership. It is You alone who is fit to lead, since creation You have led the world, fools, the hot tempered, the sulky and even those who do your will. That is how you have led people of different temperament, Everlasting Father we are comfortable with your leadership (2x).
2. Beginning from leaders of their mothers' hamlets, leaders of homesteads and leaders of clans. All leaders would agree that it is easier to herd droves of cattle than to lead five people (2x).
3. People with different personalities are difficult to lead, they can never all agree over what is for their common good. As dreadful as death is, if people's opinion is sought over whether death should be exterminated, you would find dissenting voices who would not want their enemy to live (2x).
4. The multitude can never be pacified, we have heard the high handedness of Pharaoh on the Israelites in Egypt, they cried unto God who sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt to rid them of their tormentors in the land of Canaan (2x). (Exodus: 12:31-34)
5. The Lord delivered from the hand of Pharaoh and gave them over to Moses' care to the land of Canaan, the mighty hand was upon them as they passed through the red sea. He guided them against enemies, He gave them meat (quails) as they wished. They had not arrived Canaan before the leadership of Moses became unpopular, the people backbited Moses, opposed his leadership and were longing to be under the leadership of pharaoh in Egypt (2x). (Exodus 12:31-34, 16:13)
6. Leaders should know this, that the led are waiting Sexpectantly; God is monitoring their leadership from above. If the people murmur unnecessarily, if the leaders are guilty, the people led will be vindicated, but if the leaders are guilty, the Lord will not let them go free, He punishes evil leaders and the led who murmur unnecessarily. That is why He buried Abiram, Korah and Dathan, alive (2x). (Numbers 16:1-27).
7. This is a dreadful thing, let us be careful, lest we incur the wrath of God over a leader ordained by God. God told Abram that He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. Such leaders are very much around today, if you curse them unnecessarily, God Himself will not be happy with you (1x). (Genesis 12:3)
8. This is a dreadful thing, let us be careful, lest we incur the wrath of God over a leader ordained by God. Isaac told Jacob that He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. Such leaders are very much around today, if you curse them, God Himself will not be happy with you (1x). (Genesis 27:29)
9. You Leader, never despise advice, do not boast. Moses took the advice of his father in law, Jethro and perfected his leadership. We learnt from King Solomon to seek wisdom from God (2x). (Exodus 3:1-18)
10. We should be supportive to our leaders in their weaknesses and not murmur against them. To others, Moses' leadership could have become unpopular when his hands grew tired during the battle against the Amalekites. Aaron and Hur held his hands up one on each side until the Israelites defeated the Amalekites and retired home happily (2x). (Exodus 17:12)

A careful examination of the content of Zuzu's religious sung-poetry reveals that it comprises of the solo 'Mnder', here the theme of the song is stated as the ineptitude of man's leadership strides as against the competent leadership of God. The refrain 'mrumun' serves to re-emphasize the theme to prepare the listeners to expect what the content of the song entails. The entire congregation of worshippers now join after the chorister has rendered the solo.

The singing of the stanzas now involves all of the congregation as they sing each of the stanzas twice for the sake of emphasis, some stanzas may be sang once if the content is closely related and does not differ much. The first three stanzas of this song are a commentary on the uncontested supremacy of God's leadership style and his ability to take all manner of people along without discrimination. The second stanza uses the imagery of herding cattle in droves to be easier than leading 5 disagreeable people; the third stanza expresses the difficult task of getting people to agree to a common opinion. They would even never agree to the extermination of death to differ in their opinion, lest their enemy would live.

From the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza to the rest of song, the composer interweaves Bible passages with narratives of expectations from the leaders and the led. The Bible scripture supports his opinion of what leaders and the led can do as evidenced in the Bible, how the foremost leaders made it in their leadership. It is worthy to note here that this song is full of imageries associated with the worldview of the Tiv people which are essentials that were decried to have been absent in the hymns of the missionary era (Hagher, 1981). From the fourth stanza to the tenth, the composer

churns out Bible scripture in support of the context of the song which is an advice to leaders and the led, with God as the umpire. It is an address to leaders and their subject to supplement each other to bring about purposeful leadership to arrive at the much needed development. The song embrace the Tiv and theological worldviews which Oduro (2008) argues that;

The songs composed in various Nigerian languages based on life experiences demonstrate the basic tenets of the Christian faith in theology that is familiar to the people. The singing is participatory, spontaneous and normally involves the entire congregation led by a chorus leader and backed up by a team of instrumentalists. They do not leave out their peculiar theological worldviews while composing songs.

The use of this song in canvassing for purposeful leadership is borne out of the fact that songs generally are powerful conveyers of the values of the society to the people. In Africa and Tivland particularly, songs generally served to reinforce values for the adults, served as an important part of education and learning for the children and a source of recreation, communal work and positive influence (Oduro, 2008).

#### Recommendations

Achieving quality leadership could be possible where indigenous religious sung poetry composers churn out a lot of soul searching songs on the theme of leadership. The art of listening to indigenous religious sung poetry could also be encouraged to get people to listen to the songs and imbibe the much needed social value of good leadership.

#### Conclusion

The quest for improved leadership has called for a review of the role of indigenous religious sung-poetry as a means of promoting and upholding social values among leaders and the led in our society. Using indigenous religious sung poetry

during the post missionary era of Christianity in Tiv land and other African countries was stifled by missionaries, who denied the early converts the opportunity to worship God in their own way. They later got the poetic license to compose religious songs in their own language and since then have composed a lot of songs on different themes that could instil social values in the listeners. The song under review acknowledges God as the supreme and ultimate leader and has given insights on purposeful leadership from the Bible leaders and the led, which could have the potential to bring about needed development in our country Nigeria.

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